

**A TREATISE ON ENGLISH
COMPOSITION; INCLUDING A
GENERAL VIEW OF THE
GRAMMAR OF THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649352739

A treatise on English composition; including a general view of the grammar of the English language by Henry W. Williams

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HENRY W. WILLIAMS

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GRAMMAR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

BY HENRY W. WILLIAMS,

AUTHOR OF "A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE VERSIFI-
CATION OF THE ILIAD AND ODYSSEY."

LONDON:
PUBLISHED BY T. TEGG AND SON, 73, CHEAPSIDE;
AND SOLD BY J. MASON, 66, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1836.

273.

A TREATISE
ON
ENGLISH COMPOSITION.

should embrace ; and I have ventured to hope, that it is calculated to meet the wants of advanced pupils in schools, and of young persons engaged in the cultivation of their own minds. In the treatment of some subjects, I have departed from the method usually chosen ; but it has been my constant endeavour to secure clearness and simplicity of thought.

In dedicating to you this little volume, I may be allowed to express the high opinion which I entertain, of the accuracy and extent of your learning, and of your correct taste for the beauties of the English language. It will afford me the greatest satisfaction, should this treatise meet your approbation, as an auxiliary to the attainment of a correct and elegant style.

HENRY W. WILLIAMS.

December 15, 1835.

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CHAPTER I.

A GENERAL VIEW OF THE GRAMMAR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

IN examining the structure of a language, we naturally inquire, in the first instance, into the letters of which it consists, and their combination into words; and these subjects are expressed by the term *Orthography*, which forms the first general division of grammar. Further reflection will suggest the propriety of distributing words into distinct classes, according to some common properties of meaning or of use. Thus "man," "assistant," "table," "book," may be assigned to one class, as being the names of persons and things; while "promote," "urge," must be placed in another, as indicating *an action exerted*. It will be observed too, by the attentive student, that some words undergo certain changes, as "father," "father's,"—"I promote," "I promoted;" and every such change will require to be made the subject of investigation. The division of words into various classes, and the changes which they undergo, form the two leading subjects of *Etymology*, which constitutes the second branch of grammar. The derivation of words, which this term includes when taken in its full extent, should rather be studied from a Dictionary of established character, than from a grammatical treatise.

The next subject that will present itself to the student of a language is, the arrangement of words into sentences. He will observe, that there are certain usages to be attended to, the violation of which would disfigure a composition, and be revolting to a cultivated mind. Thus it is not allowed to say, "He spoke to *she*," but "He spoke to *her*;" not "Ignorance and

vice is deplorable," but "Ignorance and vice are deplorable." The rules which have respect to the combination of words into sentences, are included under the term *Syntax*, which points out the third division of grammar. The remaining subjects of inquiry, which grammar embraces, are the correct reading of sentences, and the laws of *poetry*; and these constitute the fourth division of the study, usually termed *Prosody*.

It will be evident, that the two branches of grammar, which are most intimately connected with English Composition, are *Etymology* and *Syntax*. A correct knowledge of these is the principal means of insuring accuracy of expression, and the only foundation of a chaste and elegant style. To these two branches of grammar, the following remarks will be limited; since they are designed, not to constitute a complete grammatical system, but to afford a general view of the structure and usages of the English language.

Etymology has been said to refer to the several *classes* of words of which a language consists, and to the *changes* which words undergo. The first inquiry, then, which arises in relation to it, is, what are the classes into which the words of the English language may be most appropriately distributed?

It cannot be expected, that on this subject, perfect unanimity should exist among grammarians; since every distribution of words must originate in individual judgment, and its propriety becomes therefore, a fit subject of inquiry. Dr. Blair has suggested the division of the words of our language into *substantives*, *attributives*, and *connectives*: but this classification, however neat and simple it may appear, would involve serious inconvenience. It does not provide for *all* the words found within the compass of our language; nor is it sufficiently *minute* and *distinct*, for the purposes of grammatical explanation.

The common distribution of words into *Articles*, *Substantives*, *Adjectives*, *Pronouns*, *Verbs*, *Adverbs*, *Prepositions*, *Conjunctions*, and *Interjections*, appears to be on the whole, consistent and suitable. Though liable to some objections, it *approaches* to accuracy of thought; and